



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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January Is National Cervical Health Awareness Month

Bismarck, N.D. – January is National Cervical Health Awareness Month, and the North Dakota Department of Health is reminding women to get screened for cervical cancer. Although cervical cancer is highly preventable through screening and other preventive measures, about 4,200 women die from the disease in the United States each year.

The main cause of cervical cancer is the human papillomavirus (HPV), the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. Most people with HPV do not even know they have it because they never have symptoms or problems. Usually the body's immune system will fight off the infection, and it goes away on its own. But sometimes an HPV infection does not go away, and this can cause abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix. If that happens, treatment may be needed. If left untreated, these abnormal changes eventually can lead to cervical cancer.

You can prevent cervical cancer with regular screening tests, like the Pap test and the HPV test. The Pap test is a screening test that can detect the abnormal changes in the cervical cells before they become cancer. If cancer does occur, the Pap test can find it early when it is easier to treat.

An HPV test can find any of the types of HPV that can cause the abnormal cell changes on the cervix. The HPV test is done at the same time as the Pap test.

Current guidelines recommend that women should have a Pap test every three years beginning at age 21. These guidelines also recommend that women ages 30 to 65 should have a Pap test along with an HPV test every five years or a Pap test alone every three years. Women with certain risk factors may need to have more frequent screening or to continue screening beyond age 65.

Vaccines also have the potential to protect people from the HPV infections that can cause cancer. There are currently two vaccines available for people 11 to 26 years old. Both protect against HPV strains 16 and 18, the two main types of HPV that cause approximately 70 percent of all cervical cancers. However, women who have been vaccinated still should get regular Pap tests.

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“Unfortunately, many women do not get regular Pap tests because they are uninsured or underinsured,” said Barb Steiner with the North Dakota Department of Health. “The good news is that *Women’s Way* may be able to help women pay for their Pap and HPV test.

Women’s Way, North Dakota’s Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program, is available to eligible North Dakota women ages 40 through 64. *Women’s Way* may provide a way to pay for pelvic exams, Pap test, clinical breast exams and mammograms. To learn more about *Women’s Way* or to see if you are eligible, call 1.800.44 WOMEN or visit www.ndhealth.gov/womensway.

Another option is the North Dakota Family Planning Program, which provides reproductive health services to women, including Pap tests, pelvic exams and breast exams. Family Planning has nine main clinics and 14 satellite clinics located throughout the state. Clients are charged for services according to their household income and family size. To learn more about the Family Planning Program, call 701.328.2228 or visit <http://www.ndhealth.gov/familyplanning/> to find a clinic near you.

To learn more about cervical cancer or HPV, visit www.cancer.org or www.cancer.gov.

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